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the MAZE AGENCY®
6
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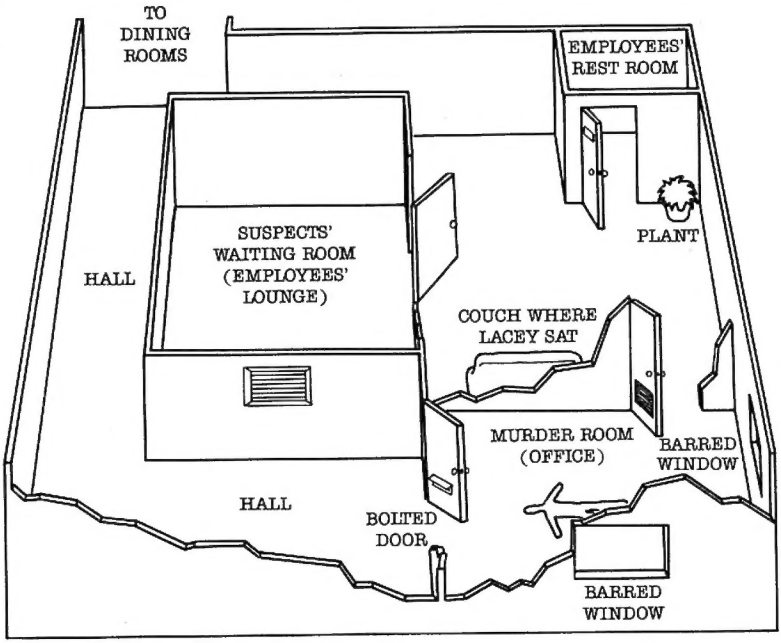
To Gabe
HUGHES '88

the MAZE AGENCY®

Diagram of the crime scene

(See page 11)



Special thanks to CHUCK REGAN for providing this illustration.

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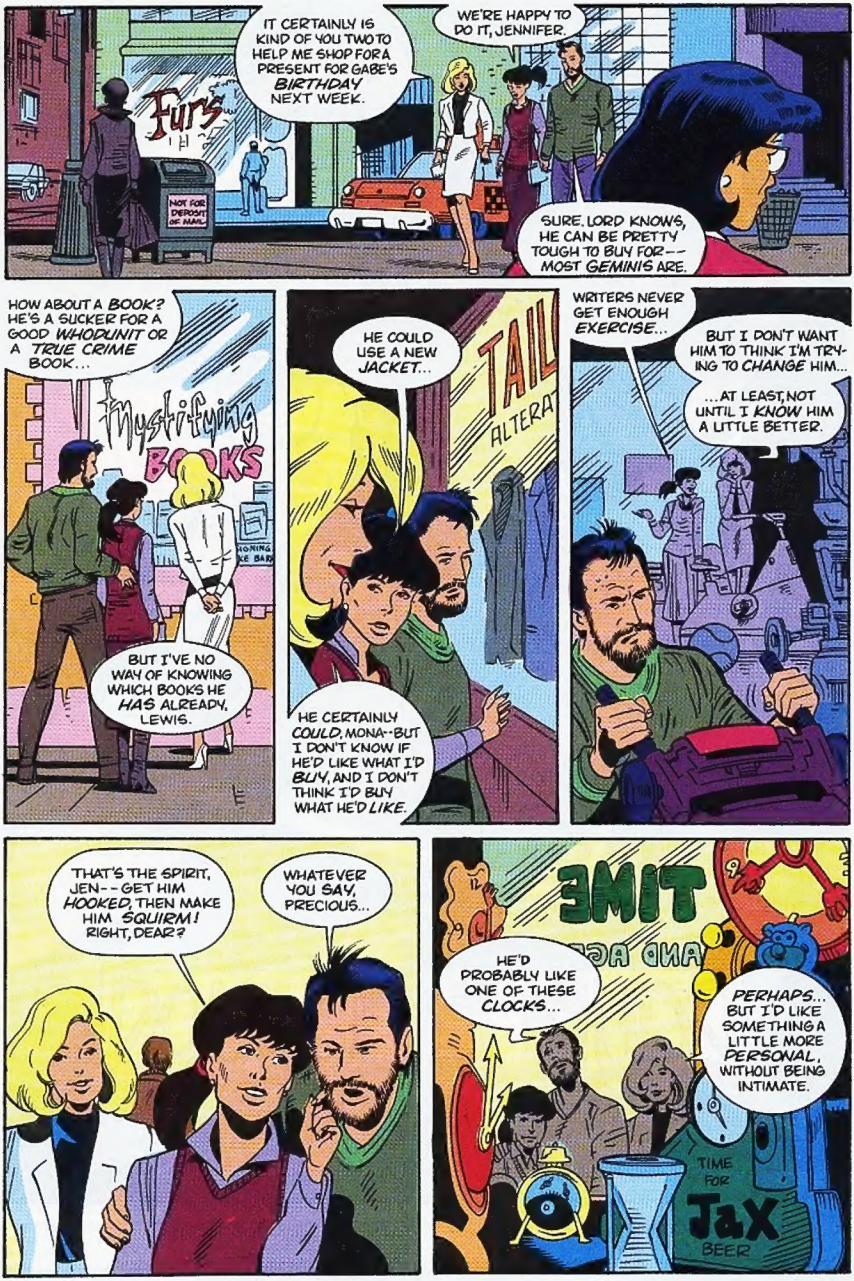
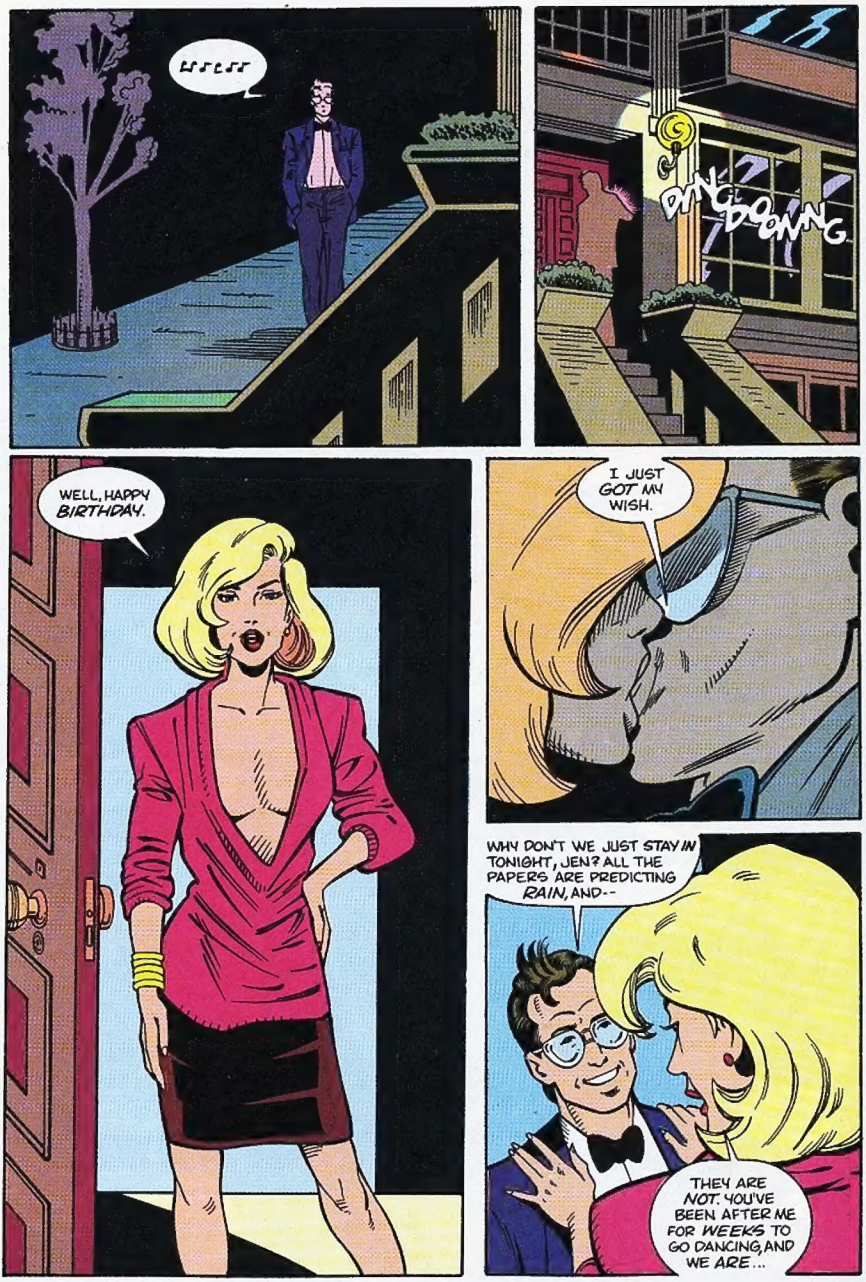

IT CERTAINLY IS KIND OF YOU TWO TO HELP ME SHOP FOR A PRESENT FOR GABE'S BIRTHDAY NEXT WEEK.
WE'RE HAPPY TO DO IT, JENNIFER.
Furs
NOT FOR DEPOSIT OR MAIL
SURE. LORD KNOWS, HE CAN BE PRETTY TOUGH TO BUY FOR-- MOST GEMINIS ARE.
HOW ABOUT A BOOK? HE'S A SUCKER FOR A GOOD WHODUNIT OR A TRUE CRIME BOOK...
Mystifying BOOKS
BUT I'VE NO WAY OF KNOWING WHICH BOOKS HE HAS ALREADY, LEWIS.
HE COULD USE A NEW JACKET...
TAIL
ALTERA
HE CERTAINLY COULD, MONA--BUT I DON'T KNOW IF HE'D LIKE WHAT I'D BUY, AND I DON'T THINK I'D BUY WHAT HE'D LIKE.
WRITERS NEVER GET ENOUGH EXERCISE...
BUT I DON'T WANT HIM TO THINK I'M TRYING TO CHANGE HIM...
...AT LEAST, NOT UNTIL I KNOW HIM A LITTLE BETTER.
THAT'S THE SPIRIT, JEN--GET HIM HOOKED, THEN MAKE HIM SQUIRM! RIGHT, DEAR?
WHATEVER YOU SAY, PRECIOUS...
TIME
HE'D PROBABLY LIKE ONE OF THESE CLOCKS...
PERHAPS... BUT I'D LIKE SOMETHING A LITTLE MORE PERSONAL, WITHOUT BEING INTIMATE.
TIME FOR
Jax
BEER

SOUNDS TO ME LIKE YOU HAVEN'T QUITE MADE UP YOUR MIND HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT GABE.
I DON'T WANT TO MOVE TOO QUICKLY...
EXACTLY. WHY DON'T MEN COME WITH USER'S MANUALS?
WHY DON'T WE WRITE ONE AND GET RICH?
...BUT YOU DON'T WANT TO LOSE HIM, EITHER.
SIGH NOT YET, NO.
?
WELL, THANK YOU BOTH VERY MUCH. I HOPE I HAVEN'T WASTED YOUR TIME.
WE WERE COMING INTO THE CITY ANYWAY, JEN. GOOD LUCK WITH THE HUNT.
'BYE, JEN.
JEN AND GABE MAKE SUCH A CUTE COUPLE... WOULDN'T IT BE NICE IF THEY COULD BE AS HAPPY AS WE ARE?
OR EVEN HAPPIER.
WHAT? WHAT DID I SAY?

EXCUSE ME, BUT AREN'T YOU JENNIFER MAYS?
THAT'S RIGHT. HAVE WE MET?
NO, BUT I HEARD YOU SPEAK AT THAT SMALL BUSINESS WOMEN'S SEMINAR LAST MONTH. YOU WERE GREAT, MISS MAYS.
THANK YOU. ›puff‹ DO YOU HAVE A NAME?
OH, GOLLY, DIDN'T I SAY? MY NAME'S LACEY, LACEY CARRUTHERS...
AND ARE YOU A SMALL BUSINESS WOMAN, LACEY?
RIGHT NOW I'M WITH A PLACE CALLED CUSTOM CRIMES. YOU KNOW, THEY STAGE MYSTERIES, WITH FAKE MURDERS AND THE LIKE...
OH, REALLY...?
I MAY BE ABLE TO GIVE YOU SOME BUSINESS, LACEY. WHY DON'T WE HAVE A DRINK AT MY CLUB?
THAT-- THAT'D BE FINE, MISS MAYS!
PLEASE, CALL ME JENNIFER.
21st CENTURY FITNESS


DING DOONNG
WELL, HAPPY BIRTHDAY.
I JUST GOT MY WISH.
WHY DON'T WE JUST STAY IN TONIGHT, JEN? ALL THE PAPERS ARE PREDICTING RAIN, AND--
THEY ARE NOT. YOU'VE BEEN AFTER ME FOR WEEKS TO GO DANCING, AND WE ARE...

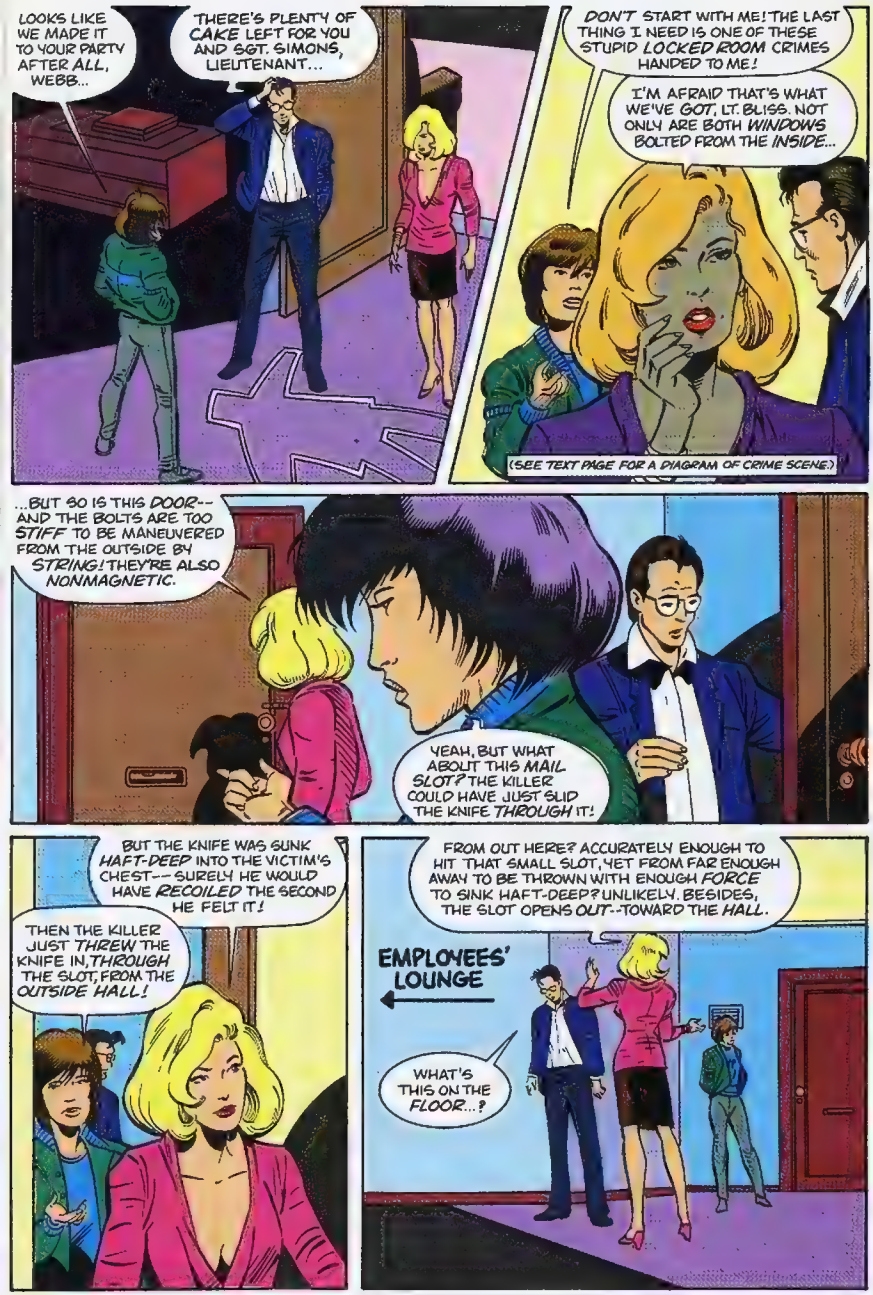
...AFTER WE'VE HAD DINNER.
THEN DO I GET MY PRESENT?
WE'LL SEE. MY, THE CITY LOOKS BEAUTIFUL TONIGHT.
I WAS JUST THINKING THE SAME THING... OR MAYBE IT'S US. WE LOOK LIKE A REMAKE OF THE THIN MAN.
YOU'RE NOT VERY THIN.
THE TITLE ACTUALLY REFERS TO THE VICTIM, NOT THE DETECTIVE...
...BUT PEOPLE THOUGHT IT MEANT THE NICK CHARLES CHARACTER, SO--
--HEY, IS THIS WHERE I GET MY PRESENT?
YOU GREEDY THING...!
BLUE Ruby
ARE YOU SURE YOU MADE RESERVATIONS?
I DON'T NEED RESERVATIONS; I OWN THE PLACE.
WHERE'S THE HEAD WAITER? THERE OUGHT TO BE A LIGHT SWITCH RIGHT ABOUT...

KLIK
SURPRISE!
THANKS FOR COMING, CARL.
MY PLEASURE, GABE. HAVE YOU TWO MET MISS ASHLEY SWIFT? HER DETECTIVE AGENCY WAS DOING SOME WORK FOR MY LAW FIRM, AND I--
SUCH A LOVELY SWEATER, JENNIFER SWEET... YOU CAN SEE ALMOST EVERYTHING, CAN'T YOU?
I REALIZE IT'S NOT THE TYPE OF THING YOU COULD WEAR, ASHLEY DEAR... ALL THOSE PLASTIC SURGERY SCARS, YOU KNOW!
I GUESS THEY ALREADY KNOW EACH OTHER...
DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT, CARL--THE BRUNETTE MAY HAVE THE HEIGHT AND THE REACH, BUT THE SMART MONEY'S ON THE BLONDE!

GREAT PARTY, BABE... BUT WHO ARE THOSE GUYS OVER IN THE CORNER?
OH, JUST A NEW CLIENT OF MINE AND HIS FRIENDS...
"...MY CLIENT IS THE MAN IN THE MIDDLE... HE'S A MARRIAGE COUNSELOR AND PSYCHIATRIST... DR. FRED SIGMUND."
"DR. FRED SIGMUND"? JEN, WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?
OH, LOOK, SOMETHING'S HAPPENING...
"I DON'T CARE HOW 'OPEN' YOUR MARRIAGE IS...
...I TOLD YOU TO KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF MY HUSBAND!
THAT'S ENOUGH...
KRAKT
...PERHAPS SHE WOULD HAVE STAYED IN HER OWN BED-- IF YOU HAD!
GET YOUR HANDS OFF MY WIFE, PAL!

HONEY, DON'T--!
BUT, DARLING--!
STOP THIS, ALL OF YOU...!
...WE'D BETTER HAVE A GROUP SESSION RIGHT NOW, TO GET THIS SORTED OUT...
"JEN, WHAT WAS THAT ALL ABOUT?"
YOU'LL FIND OUT, ACE. RIGHT NOW, WHY DON'T YOU OPEN YOUR PRESENTS?
GOOD IDEA!
A DESK CALENDAR. THANKS, HERMAN.
DIDJA SEE ALL THOSE DATES I CIRCLED IN RED? THOSE ARE YOUR DEAD-LINES, WEBB!
HERE'S MY PRESENT, SHAKESPEARE!
:Ahem:

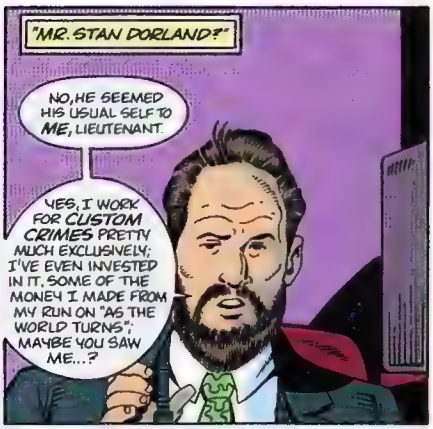
I HAVE TO CHECK ON SOMETHING; WHY DON'T YOU FINISH OPENING YOUR PRESENTS? ENJOY YOURSELF...
...BUT NOT TOO MUCH.
LACEY, ISN'T IT ABOUT TIME?
THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT, TOO! I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR THE GUNSHOT...
Oh, MY.
"JEN..?
JEN, WHAT'S GOING ON?
THIS WAS GOING TO BE YOUR PRESENT--A LOCKED ROOM "MURDER" FOR YOU TO SOLVE!
EMPLOYEES' REST ROOM
A FAKE CRIME? HONEY, THAT'S A GREAT IDEA! AND THAT GUY'S A GREAT CORPSE!
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND, GABE...
...THAT GUY'S A REAL CORPSE!

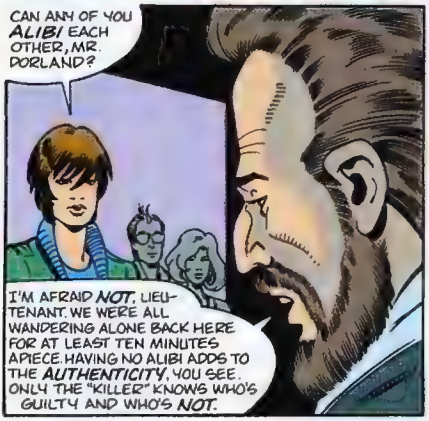

LOOKS LIKE WE MADE IT TO YOUR PARTY AFTER ALL, WEBB...
THERE'S PLENTY OF CAKE LEFT FOR YOU AND SGT. SIMONS, LIEUTENANT...
DON'T START WITH ME! THE LAST THING I NEED IS ONE OF THESE STUPID LOCKED ROOM CRIMES HANDED TO ME!
I'M AFRAID THAT'S WHAT WE'VE GOT, LT. BLISS. NOT ONLY ARE BOTH WINDOWS BOLTED FROM THE INSIDE...
(SEE TEXT PAGE FOR A DIAGRAM OF CRIME SCENE.)
...BUT SO IS THIS DOOR-- AND THE BOLTS ARE TOO STIFF TO BE MANEUVERED FROM THE OUTSIDE BY STRING! THEY'RE ALSO NONMAGNETIC.
YEAH, BUT WHAT ABOUT THIS MAIL SLOT? THE KILLER COULD HAVE JUST SLID THE KNIFE THROUGH IT!
BUT THE KNIFE WAS SUNK HAFT-DEEP INTO THE VICTIM'S CHEST-- SURELY HE WOULD HAVE RECOILED THE SECOND HE FELT IT!
THEN THE KILLER JUST THREW THE KNIFE IN, THROUGH THE SLOT, FROM THE OUTSIDE HALL!
FROM OUT HERE? ACCURATELY ENOUGH TO HIT THAT SMALL SLOT, YET FROM FAR ENOUGH AWAY TO BE THROWN WITH ENOUGH FORCE TO SINK HAFT-DEEP? UNLIKELY. BESIDES, THE SLOT OPENS OUT--TOWARD THE HALL.
EMPLOYEES' LOUNGE
WHAT'S THIS ON THE FLOOR...?

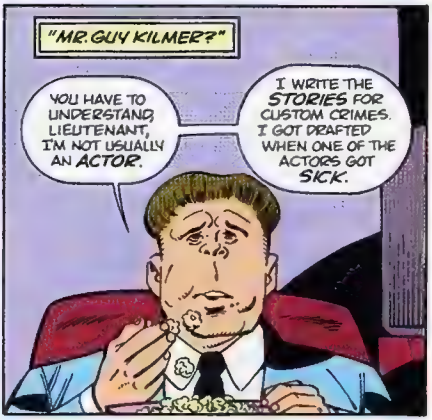
...THEY'RE POPCORN KERNELS! WE HAD POPCORN AT THE PARTY, BUT...
THIS IS VERY ODD...
A SMALL NAIL HOLE IN THIS BASEBOARD.. AND THERE'S ONE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE HALL,TOO...
...THIS VENT HAS BEEN OPENED RECENTLY,AND SOME DIRT ON THE BOTTOM HAS BEEN DISTURBED.
DOES THE VENTILATION SYSTEM GO INSIDE THE OFFICE?
YES...YES, IT DOES. BUT NONE OF THE OFFICE VENTS WERE DISTURBED.
I DON'T KNOW WHY I'M BOTHERING WITH ALL THIS...
THE VENT ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE HALL'S BEEN OPENED,TOO!
...IF THERE WERE ONLY TWO DOORS AND ONE OF THEM WAS UNLOCKED,THEN THE KILLER MUST HAVE GONE THROUGH THE OTHER ONE!
BUT I WAS SITTING IN FRONT OF IT RIGHT AFTER MR.DANIELS WENT IN! NO ONE ELSE WENT IN OR CAME OUT, LIEUTENANT! NO ONE COULD HAVE!
NO ONE BUT YOU.
YOU THINK I--?
CALM DOWN, LACEY. I'M SURE THE LIEUTENANT DOESN'T THINK THAT.

NO? YOU SAID NO ONE WAS HIDING IN THE OFFICE WHEN YOU FOUND THE BODY--THAT MAKES HER THE ONLY POSSIBLE KILLER! IT'S ELEMENTARY!
THAT'S MY LINE!
SHUT UP, WEBB.
I QUESTIONED ALL THE WORKERS, LIEUTENANT --NONE OF 'EM SAW ANY-THING GOIN' ON BACK HERE.
I GAVE THE CUSTOM CRIMES PEOPLE THE RUN OF THIS AREA FOR THEIR PRODUCTION.
WEIRD LOOKIN' KNIFE, HUH? DESIGN'S REAL MODERN...WE MAY BE ABLE T' TRACE IT...
FUNNY THING, THOUGH-- ITS BLADE IS COATED WITH SOME POISON, LIKE ACID! IF THE STAB HADN'T KILLED HIM INSTANTLY, THE ACID WOULDA!
I GOT THE SUSPECTS READY WHENEVER YOU WANT 'EM, LOOT.
"...MISS SHEILA BURTON?"
I DID A LOT OF ACTING IN MR. DANIELS'S CUSTOM CRIME PLAYS...UNTIL MY BIG BREAK COMES, YOU KNOW?
AND THE SOONER THE BETTER. DANIELS WAS A CREEP; HE WAS ALL OVER ANYTHING IN SKIRTS!

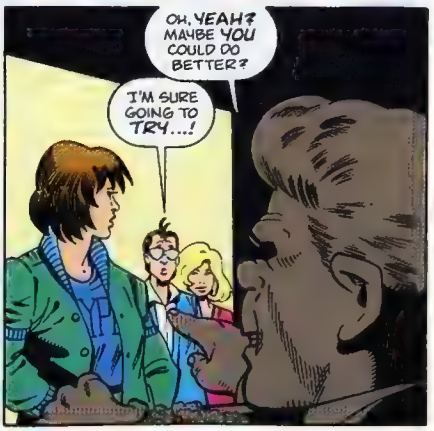
AND WAS HE ALL OVER YOU TONIGHT?
NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT, NO...HE SEEMED A LITTLE QUIETER, LIKE HE WAS WORRIED ABOUT SOMETHING.


"MR. STAN DORLAND?"
NO, HE SEEMED HIS USUAL SELF TO ME, LIEUTENANT.
YES, I WORK FOR CUSTOM CRIMES PRETTY MUCH EXCLUSIVELY; I'VE EVEN INVESTED IN IT. SOME OF THE MONEY I MADE FROM MY RUN ON "AS THE WORLD TURNS"; MAYBE YOU SAW ME...?


CAN ANY OF YOU ALIBI EACH OTHER, MR. DORLAND?
I'M AFRAID NOT, LIEUTENANT. WE WERE ALL WANDERING ALONE BACK HERE FOR AT LEAST TEN MINUTES APIECE. HAVING NO ALIBI ADDS TO THE AUTHENTICITY, YOU SEE. ONLY THE "KILLER" KNOWS WHO'S GUILTY AND WHO'S NOT.

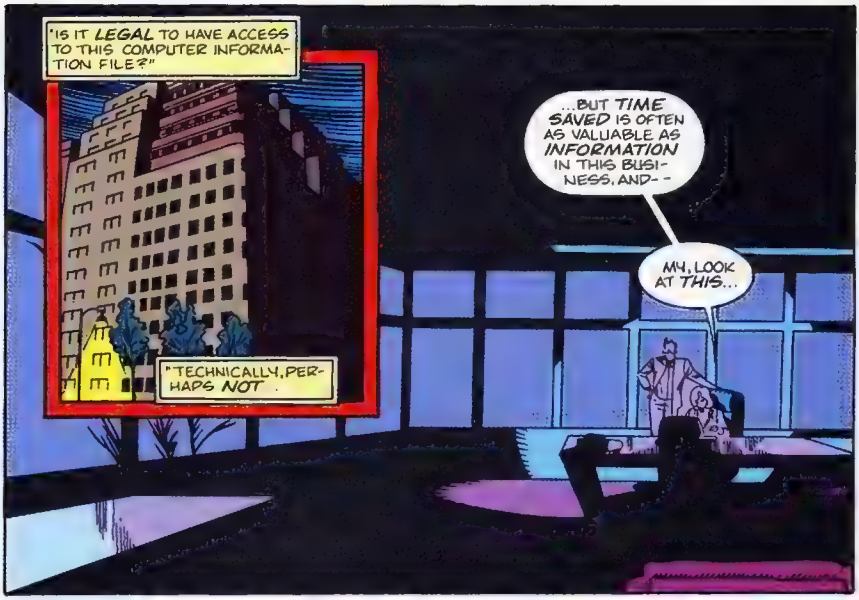

"MR. GUY KILMER?"
YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND, LIEUTENANT, I'M NOT USUALLY AN ACTOR.
I WRITE THE STORIES FOR CUSTOM CRIMES. I GOT DRAFTED WHEN ONE OF THE ACTORS GOT SICK.

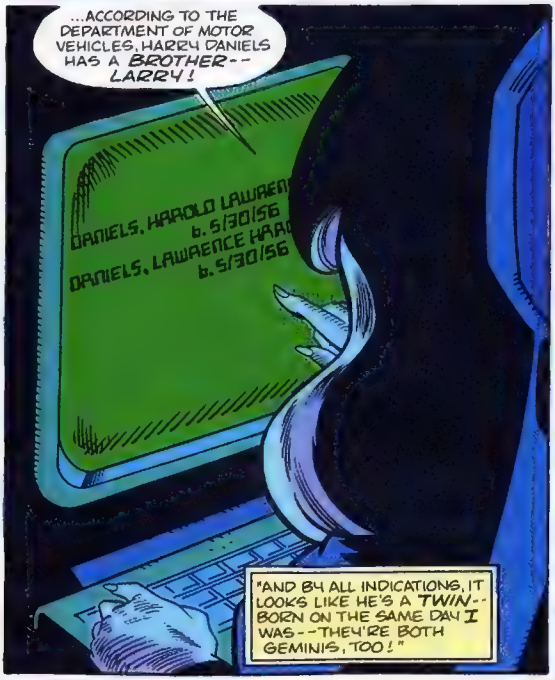
THEN WHO WAS THE KILLER IN YOUR PLAY, MR. KILMER?
STAN. "DR. FRED SIGMUND" HE'S A PSYCHIATRIST, SEE, AND HE HYPNOTIZED LACEY INTO THINKING NO ONE WENT PAST HER!
HYPNOTIZED-? THAT OLD GAG--?

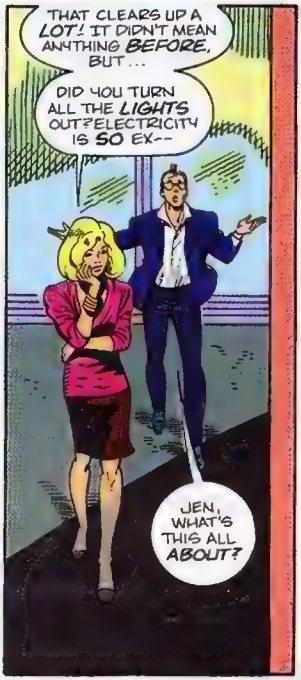

OH, YEAH? MAYBE YOU COULD DO BETTER?
I'M SURE GOING TO TRY...!

I WAS HOPING DANIELS MIGHT HAVE LEFT SOME NOTES THAT WOULD GIVE US SOME HELP--BUT NOTHING SO FAR...
"SEE ANYTHING, MISS MAYS?"
NO, LIEUTENANT... JUST GRASPING AT STRAWS, I'M AFRAID...
LOOK, SERGEANT--THE SLOT IN THIS DOOR IS TOO NARROW TO REACH THROUGH, BUT WHY COULDN'T THE KILLER HAVE STUCK SOME KIND OF EXTENDER ARM OR GIMMICK THROUGH IT AND THROWN THE BOLT?
NICE TRY, PROFESSOR
...BUT WE SEARCHED THEM, AND THE WHOLE AREA--NOBODY HAD ANY KINDA SPRINGS, WIRES, OR ANY OTHER DOOHICKEYS ON 'EM, AND THERE WEREN'T ANY HIDDEN ANYWHERE!
SHOOT--!
DID MR. DANIELS EVER HARASS YOU, MS. CARRUTHERS--SEXUALLY, I MEAN?
HE TRIED TO, OFTEN ENOUGH... BEHIND HIS BACK WE CALLED HIM "DIRTY HARRY"...

...BUT YOU CAN'T BELIEVE I'D KILL HIM JUST FOR THAT--!
IT'S HAPPENED BEFORE...
AS A CRIME OF PASSION, PERHAPS, LIEUTENANT...
...BUT YOU CAN'T BELIEVE SHE'D MURDER HIM UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, WHERE SHE WAS THE ONLY POSSIBLE KILLER!
MORE THAN ONE KILLER'S TRIED THAT OLD "DOUBLE-WHAMMY," MISS MAYS: "SHE'S THE ONLY ONE WHO COULD HAVE, SO SHE DIDN'T."
I DON'T BELIEVE SHE KILLED HIM EITHER, LIEUTENANT-- AND I'M GOING TO PROVE IT!
ASHLEY...
LT. BUSS, I'M ASHLEY SWIFT-- OF SWIFT INVESTIGATIONS, INC.
YOU DON'T HAVE A BOYFRIEND WHO THINKS HE'S SHERLOCK HOLMES, DO YOU?
I DON'T NEED ONE! AND I DON'T NEED A CLIENT! THE PUBLICITY FROM SOLVING A MURDER COMMITTED IN SWEET JENNIFER'S CLUB WILL MORE THAN REPAY MY EFFORTS! TA-TA!
FRIEND OF YOURS?
NOT IN THIS LIFE.

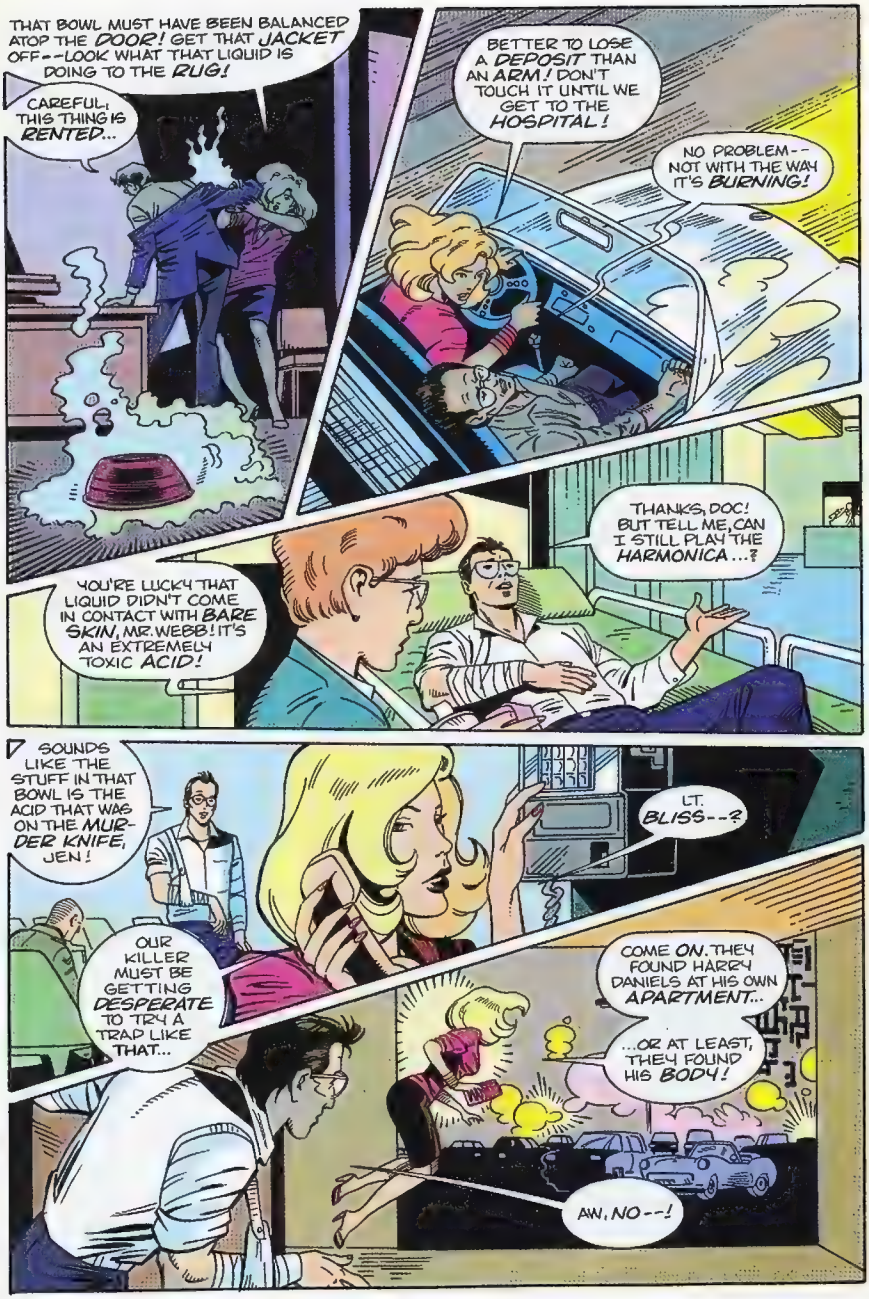

"IS IT LEGAL TO HAVE ACCESS TO THIS COMPUTER INFORMATION FILE?"
"TECHNICALLY, PERHAPS NOT."
...BUT TIME SAVED IS OFTEN AS VALUABLE AS INFORMATION IN THIS BUSINESS, AND--
MM, LOOK AT THIS...

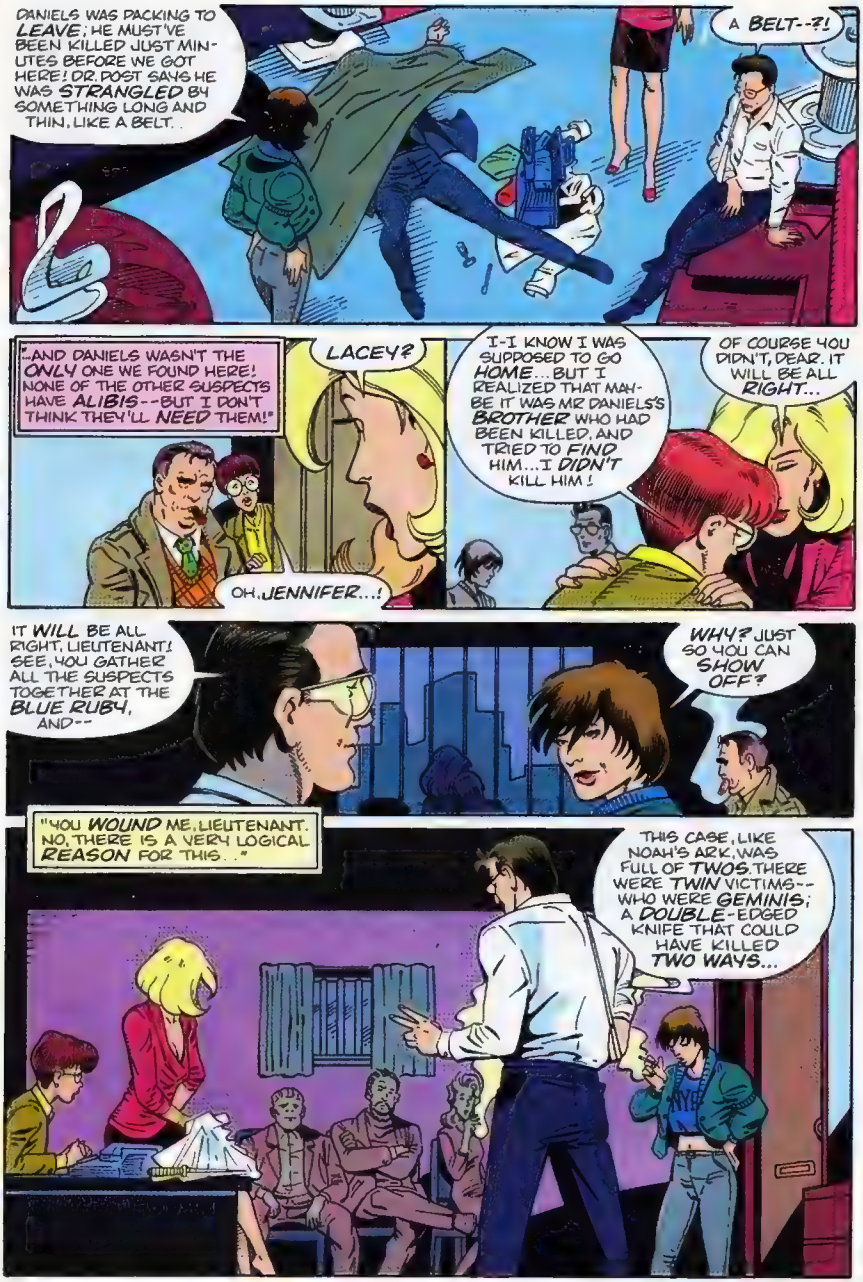

...ACCORDING TO THE DEPARTMENT OF MOTOR VEHICLES, HARRY DANIELS HAS A BROTHER--LARRY!
DANIELS, HAROLD LAWREN b. 5/30/56
DANIELS, LAWRENCE HARO b. 5/30/56
"AND BY ALL INDICATIONS, IT LOOKS LIKE HE'S A TWIN--BORN ON THE SAME DAY I WAS--THEY'RE BOTH GEMINIS, TOO!"


THAT CLEARS UP A LOT! IT DIDN'T MEAN ANYTHING BEFORE, BUT...
DID YOU TURN ALL THE LIGHTS OUT? ELECTRICITY IS SO EX--
JEN, WHAT'S THIS ALL ABOUT?

"THE DEAD MAN PARTED HIS HAIR ON THE RIGHT, BUT HIS DRIVER'S LICENSE PHOTO SHOWED IT PARTED ON THE LEFT. AT THE TIME, I THOUGHT NOTHING OF IT...
...BUT NOW THAT WE KNOW HE HAS A TWIN, IT'S SUBJECT TO AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT INTERPRETATION!
TWINS! THAT'S A WORSE CLICHÉ THAN HYPNO-TISM!
Y-YES...?
MR. DANIELS, I'M JENNIFER MAYS, A PRIVATE INVESTI-GATOR. MAY I SPEAK WITH YOU?
A DETECTIVE? YOU WANT MY BROTHER, HAROLD, NOT--
YES, I DO, MR. DANIELS--
--AND I'M LOOKING AT HIM!
NOT FOR LONG!
DANIELS, STOP--!

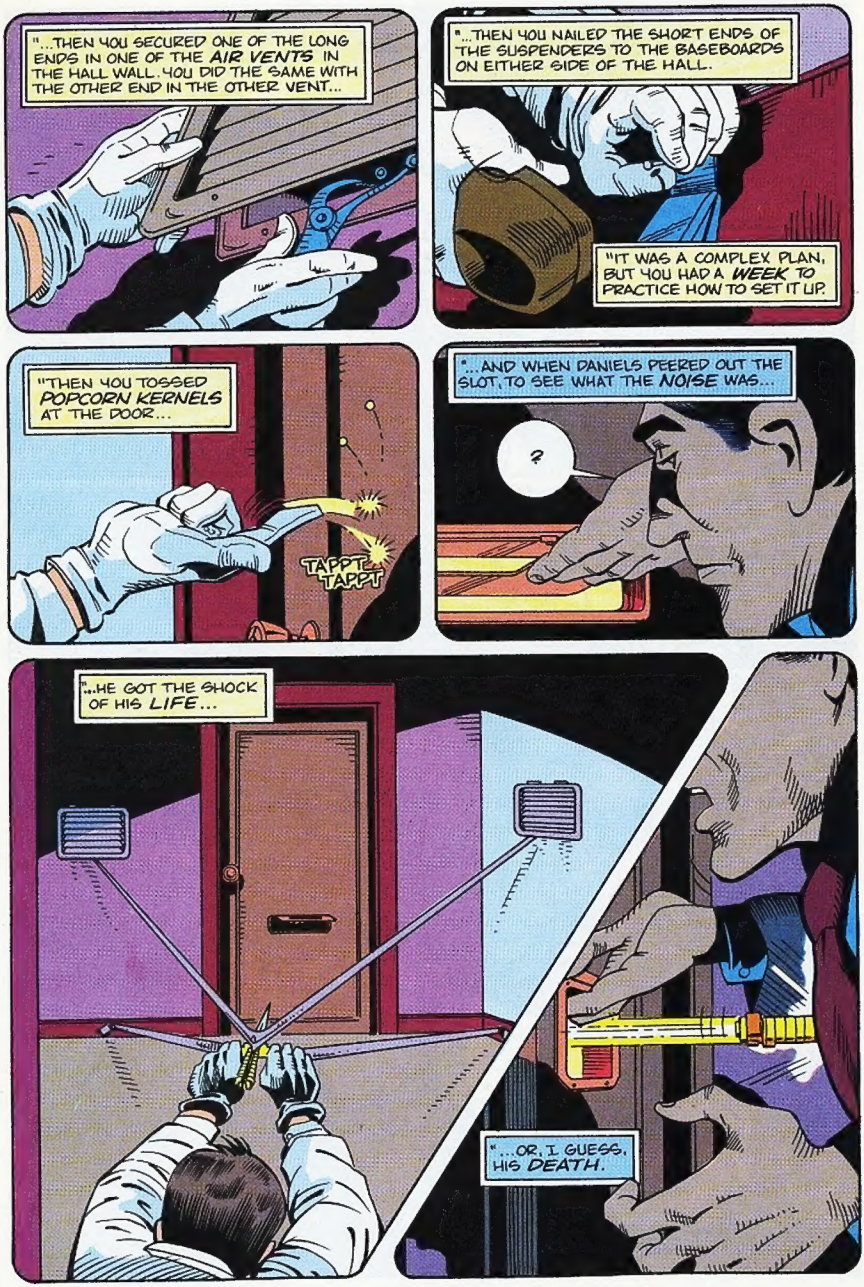
THAT'S WHAT I GET FOR WEARING HEELS!
COME ON, ACE! THERE ARE ONLY TWO PLACES HE CAN GO! I'LL NOTIFY LT. BLISS TO WATCH ONE...
...AND WE'LL CHECK OUT THE OTHER!
CUSTOM CRIMES
BREAKING COMPUTER SECURITY...PICKING LOCKS...YOU'RE REALLY A ROLE MODEL FOR PRIVATE DETECTIVES TONIGHT, BABE!
HUSH! THERE COULD BE SOMEONE HIDING...
MAYBE DANIELS IS IN HERE! STAND BACK, JEN, I'LL--
GABE, BE CAREFUL--
OWWW! WHAT THE HELL--?!
GABE--!


THAT BOWL MUST HAVE BEEN BALANCED ATOP THE DOOR! GET THAT JACKET OFF--LOOK WHAT THAT LIQUID IS DOING TO THE RUG!
CAREFUL, THIS THING IS RENTED...
BETTER TO LOSE A DEPOSIT THAN AN ARM! DON'T TOUCH IT UNTIL WE GET TO THE HOSPITAL!
NO PROBLEM--NOT WITH THE WAY IT'S BURNING!
YOU'RE LUCKY THAT LIQUID DIDN'T COME IN CONTACT WITH BARE SKIN, MR. WEBB! IT'S AN EXTREMELY TOXIC ACID!
THANKS, DOC! BUT TELL ME, CAN I STILL PLAY THE HARMONICA...?
SOUNDS LIKE THE STUFF IN THAT BOWL IS THE ACID THAT WAS ON THE MURDER KNIFE, JEN!
LT. BLISS--?
OUR KILLER MUST BE GETTING DESPERATE TO TRY A TRAP LIKE THAT...
COME ON. THEY FOUND HARRY DANIELS AT HIS OWN APARTMENT...
...OR AT LEAST, THEY FOUND HIS BODY!
AW, NO--!


DANIELS WAS PACKING TO LEAVE; HE MUST'VE BEEN KILLED JUST MINUTES BEFORE WE GOT HERE! DR. POST SAYS HE WAS STRANGLED BY SOMETHING LONG AND THIN, LIKE A BELT.
A BELT--?!
"...AND DANIELS WASN'T THE ONLY ONE WE FOUND HERE! NONE OF THE OTHER SUSPECTS HAVE ALIBIS--BUT I DON'T THINK THEY'LL NEED THEM!"
LACEY?
OH, JENNIFER...!
I-I KNOW I WAS SUPPOSED TO GO HOME... BUT I REALIZED THAT MAYBE IT WAS MR DANIELS'S BROTHER WHO HAD BEEN KILLED, AND TRIED TO FIND HIM... I DIDN'T KILL HIM!
OF COURSE YOU DIDN'T, DEAR. IT WILL BE ALL RIGHT...
IT WILL BE ALL RIGHT, LIEUTENANT! SEE, YOU GATHER ALL THE SUSPECTS TOGETHER AT THE BLUE RUBY, AND--
WHY? JUST SO YOU CAN SHOW OFF?
"YOU WOUND ME, LIEUTENANT. NO, THERE IS A VERY LOGICAL REASON FOR THIS..."
THIS CASE, LIKE NOAH'S ARK, WAS FULL OF TWOS. THERE WERE TWIN VICTIMS--WHO WERE GEMINIS; A DOUBLE-EDGED KNIFE THAT COULD HAVE KILLED TWO WAYS...

...IN FACT, THE KNIFE IS A GOOD PLACE TO START. WHY COAT THE BLADE WITH A DEADLY ACID? SO EVEN A GLANCING CUT WOULD KILL THE VICTIM!
MY THINKING EXACTLY, DARLING...
...BECAUSE THE KILLER THREW THE BLADE FROM VERY CRAMPED QUARTERS...
...NAMELY, FROM INSIDE THE VENTILATION DUCT. THAT WAS WHY THE AIR VENTS HAD BEEN OPENED!
YOU KILLED HIM, MS. BURTON! YOU'RE THE ONLY SUSPECT THIN ENOUGH TO CRAWL INSIDE THOSE DUCTS!
IS SHE NUTS?
AFRAID NOT, ASHLEY. NOT ONLY WERE THE VENTS IN THIS ROOM NOT OPENED... BUT MS. BURTON WAS WEARING A WHITE SUIT WHICH, EVEN AFTER THE MURDER, WAS STILL SPOTLESS!
THEN WHO DID KILL HIM, SMARTY?
TO ANSWER THAT, WE GO BACK TO LOGIC 101! IF THERE WAS ONLY ONE ACCESSIBLE ENTRANCE TO THE ROOM, THAT WAS HOW THE KNIFE GOT IN!
ONE DOOR WAS GUARDED, AND THE OTHER WAS LOCKED...

...BUT THE LOCKED DOOR HAD A SLOT IN IT. THAT'S WHAT THE KNIFE WAS PROPELLED THROUGH!
HOW? THE POLICE SAID NONE OF THE SUSPECTS WAS CARRYING ANY WIRES, OR SPRINGS, OR GIMMICKS--
YOU'RE THINKING ONLY OF MECHANICAL METHODS OF PROPULSION. THE SIMPLEST METHOD IN THE WORLD WAS PLAINLY EVIDENT ALL EVENING...
MR. DORLAND, WHY DO FIREMEN WEAR RED SUSPENDERS?
WHAT?
THE ANSWER TO THAT IS, OF COURSE: "TO HOLD THEIR PANTS UP." AND MURDERERS WEAR SUSPENDERS IN ORDER TO SHOOT KNIVES!
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
"I'M TALKING ABOUT YOU. DURING YOUR 'ALIBI PERIOD,' YOU WENT TO THE HALL OUTSIDE THE BOLTED DOOR AND TOOK YOUR SUSPENDERS OFF...


"...THEN YOU SECURED ONE OF THE LONG ENDS IN ONE OF THE AIR VENTS IN THE HALL WALL. YOU DID THE SAME WITH THE OTHER END IN THE OTHER VENT...
"...THEN YOU NAILED THE SHORT ENDS OF THE SUSPENDERS TO THE BASEBOARDS ON EITHER SIDE OF THE HALL.
"IT WAS A COMPLEX PLAN, BUT YOU HAD A WEEK TO PRACTICE HOW TO SET IT UP.
"THEN YOU TOSSED POPCORN KERNELS AT THE DOOR...
TAPPT TAPPT
"...AND WHEN DANIELS PEERED OUT THE SLOT, TO SEE WHAT THE NOISE WAS...
?
"...HE GOT THE SHOCK OF HIS LIFE...
"...OR, I GUESS, HIS DEATH.

THAT'S WHY SUCH AN UNUSUAL KNIFE WAS USED--TO SHOOT IT! THEN YOU MUST HAVE BURNED THE GLOVES AND FLUSHED THEM AND THE NAILS DOWN THE TOILET!
PROVE IT, MISTER!
BRIMANG
THAT WAS SIMONS.
HE COULDN'T FIND THE SUSPENDERS IN YOUR PLACE...YOU MUST HAVE DESTROYED THEM AFTER YOU USED THEM TO STRANGLE HARRY DANIELS. BUT THAT'S OKAY...
...YOU PROBABLY DIDN'T THINK TO WEAR GLOVES FOR THAT MURDER--THE LAB OUGHT TO BE ABLE TO PICK UP FLECKS OF DANIELS'S SKIN ON YOUR HANDS!
I DIDN'T KILL--!
YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO REMAIN SILENT...
I'LL BE DAMNED! THAT IS A BETTER SOLUTION THAN MINE!
TOO BAD DORLAND DIDN'T STICK TO FAKE CRIMES!
"MAYBE HARRY KNEW DORLAND WOULD TRY TO KILL HIM TO USE THEIR PARTNERSHIP INSURANCE TO GAIN OWNERSHIP OF CUSTOM CRIMES...OR MAYBE HE ASKED HIS BROTHER TO TAKE HIS PLACE ON A LARK--
"JEN...?
ARE YOU OKAY?
I'M JUST SICK ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED. MY NEW FRIEND ACCUSED OF MURDER. TWO MEN KILLED. YOUR BIRTHDAY RUINED...

...AND YOU WERE ALMOST KILLED... AND IT WAS MY FAULT.
DORLAND'S FAULT, JEN -- BUT YOU SAVED ME, TOO, REMEMBER?
GOD, IF I HADN'T...
I THINK WE'D BETTER GO UPSTAIRS.
KLIK
END

from the desk of
Jennifer Mays

MAZE AGENTS

1547 DeKalb St., Norristown, Pa 19401

Dear Michael **[Which one?—MWB]**,

I just finished reading *The MAZE Agency* #2: "Murder, the Lost Episodes," and couldn't help but write. The story was very good. I liked this story better than the first issue. This issue felt as if Mike was really fully used to the characters and comfortable with them. The story was fast-paced and a true mystery. I was quite surprised by the ending; it had me guessing until the killer was revealed.

The art, though, was what really impressed me. Adam's pencils are the best. The more work I see from him, the more I like his work. I especially like the way he draws women. Even in sweats, the women are sexy.

Galen West
Fresno State University
Fresno, CA

— And let's not forget the inking of Rick Magyar when it comes to the art, eh? And speaking of art, this issue marks the first time other artists have drawn Jen and Gabe in these pages. What do you think of them as interpreted by Joe Staton and Rich Rankin?

If you haven't read *MAZE* #2, please note that the next two letters discuss the solution to the murder. As Archie Goodwin (Rex Stout's, not Marvel Comics') would say, "I'm just telling you." — MWB

Misters Barr and Eury,

"Murder, the Lost Episodes" intrigued me right away, but the execution of the story fell far short of the mark.

First is a production problem. Adam Hughes, an otherwise excellent penciller, seems intent to tell his visual story in too many close-ups; the panels become too crowded (when the dialogue is added), which creates a cluttered page. Also, his panel flow seems to cause problems with the lettering, as the eye carries the reader's attention to the wrong panels and information is read out of order (page 6, for example, where the dialogue in panel 5 is read before panel 4).

As for the writing, I liked the story idea. It was very clever. But again, it wasn't handled as well as it could have been. I have two major problems with the resolution to the mystery: 1) On page 3, we are told that the lost episodes of *Lefty* were "old kinescopes." Kinescope, to the best of my knowledge, is the early form of videotape we use today. It was shot live when recorded and not filmed on a negative. This contradicts the "mirror set and costume" clue; there was no negative to "flip." 2) The "reversed" shirt to hide the spattered blood routine! Come *on*! That much blood (and far less) would soak through a shirt, unless it were a vinyl shirt or extraordinarily thick (like a butcher's apron). No indication was made that the killer's shirt was anything but a normal poly/cotton blend!

One last item: Who was the couple on the last page (he with a beard, she with black hair) described as being "like Rob and Laura Petrie"? I didn't see them anywhere else in the last scene. Sloppy, guys.

Steve Erwin
(Penciller of DC's *Checkmate*)

— Aside from that, how did you like Dallas, Mrs. Kennedy?

You're correct in your criticisms of Adam's storytelling, Steve, and you may say much the same about *MAZE* #3. However, I think issues #4 and #5 were vast improvements.

Yes, my use of the term "kinescope" was inaccurate. This does not violate the story premise, however; it just points out that the writer's research wasn't quite thorough enough.

About the "reversed" shirt, though, I have to differ. Blood coagulates quickly, and often is not absorbed as quickly or as thoroughly as thinner liquids. Your remark about butcher's aprons makes them sound like they're made of armor plate. I have some pullover shirts that are thick enough to conceal a quantity of blood, and it may have been that Andrews's shirt was of a synthetic fabric which would have absorbed far less of the blood than "a poly/cotton blend."

Gabe's mention of "Rob and Laura Petrie" was not meant to be taken literally, but to refer to the affection between Lewis and Mona, and to tie into the sitcom subtext of the story. Lewis and Mona weren't present in the denouement because Lewis was in jail, and Mona was visiting him.

Keep up the good work on *Checkmate*, Steve. If our paths should cross at a convention, the first round's on me (we can see how well my shirt absorbs it). — MWB

Dear Mike **[Which one?]**,

After only two issues, it's clear that *The MAZE Agency* is going to be a major success. The whole style and feel of the book are unlike anything else on the stands.

I've never been particularly good at solving these things, and so have to wait until the denouement before I understand everything. I had worked out that the backwards shirt was a clue and had even thought of backwards filming, but I couldn't make 2+2=4. But the teaming of professional P.I. Jennifer Mays and amateur, love-besotted (or maybe lust-besotted) **[or maybe both]** Gabriel Webb looks good and works well. The interplay, be it witty repartee, or more serious discussion between the two stars, is entertaining to read and watch. I note that the visuals by Adam Hughes and Rick Magyar play just as great a part in this as the text, highlighting the nods and winks and wonderful facial expressions.

I didn't know anything about "lost" *Honeymooners* episodes, which is the penalty for living over here, I suppose **[Yeah, but you're a lot closer to Stonehenge!]**, but the story didn't make any less impact because of that. And using articles, thankfully typeset, to introduce the story was the best device for getting over the information without trying to slip it into contrived conversation or thought balloons, the absence of which I heartily applaud, by the way. Using voice-over and off-camera dialogue also helps the TV show/movie image which, I think, you're deliberately trying to project. I presume these are the linguistic traditions you're supposed to be breaking? **[Yep. Aren't we bad?]** Julia's coloring is excellent, and fortunately, the production is good enough to bring that out.

Malcolm Bourne
Manchester, England

NEXT ISSUE: Learn some of Jennifer's mysterious past in "Hearts of Glass," with guest artists Greg Shoemaker and Bill Anderson.